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Teaching for democracy in the absence of transitional justice: The case of Northern Ireland

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Key Words: Northern Ireland, transitional justice, citizenship education

Abstract:

In Northern Ireland, the 1998 Good Friday Agreement ended thirty years of civil conflict—known as ‘the Troubles’—by achieving nominal peace between the opposing factions. It did so, however, through a political power-sharing formula that had no provisions for state-sponsored transitional justice mechanisms. We ask to what extent education can promote the goals of transitional justice in *the absence* of a formal process. Drawing from qualitative data and using a new citizenship education programme in Northern Ireland as our case study, we argue that organizational constraints within the education system limit the potential of the programme. We also identify missed opportunities, such as the de-emphasis on the importance of teaching political literacy. Our findings have implications for other societies undergoing transition from violent conflict by highlighting the potential opportunities for citizenship education to aid in transitional justice efforts.

In Northern Ireland, the 1998 Good Friday Agreement ended thirty years of civil conflict—known as ‘the Troubles’—by achieving nominal peace between the opposing Unionist and Nationalist factions. It did so, however, through a political power-sharing formula that left little room to account for past atrocities committed by both sides and no provisions for conventional state-sponsored transitional justice mechanisms to address the Troubles. Truth commissions, tribunals, or other transitional justice venues can be “understood as judicial and non-judicial measures that seek to promote accountability and redress for massive violations of human rights, [and are] increasingly recognized as a fundamental part of peacebuilding efforts” (Ramírez-Barat and Duthie 2015, 1). As this special journal issue demonstrates, education plays a varied yet critical role in supporting the goals of formal transitional justice processes across the globe—from outreach programs that educate the public about a truth commission’s findings to new school curriculum that focus on the recent past.

We shift this lens slightly by asking to what extent education can promote the goals of transitional justice in *the absence* of a formal process. Drawing on a new citizenship education programme in Northern Ireland (which incorporated areas of learning relevant to transitional justice) and interviews with teachers and curriculum specialists, we argue that organizational constraints within the education system, namely the low status and priority given to citizenship in the curriculum, undermine the potential of the programme. We also identify missed opportunities, such as teachers' underestimation of the importance of teaching political literacy and bias towards certain sectors of society, which is particularly important given that the peace agreement created new arrangements for power-sharing government. Underlying these findings is a tension between history and citizenship education: the extent to which education for reconciliation and democratic citizenship can be separated from teaching directly about a difficult past. These findings have implications for other societies undergoing transition from violent conflict by highlighting this tension and addressing both the opportunities and limits of citizenship education in aiding transitional justice efforts.

We begin this paper with a brief overview of literature related to the potential role of education in the transformation of post-conflicts societies. Using broad strokes, we outline the historical and political background necessary for understanding the Northern Ireland case while also mapping the current educational landscape. The final part of the paper presents findings from empirical research carried out with teachers on social memory and citizenship education in Northern Ireland.

Transformation and change through education

After violent conflict, education has the potential to play an important role in long-term, post-conflict development. While there are multiple roles for education in these contexts, we

draw attention to two aspects: first, the challenge of teaching about the past so that new generations may learn about conflict within their own society and how it has affected intergroup relations; and second, the extent to which education can educate children about new political arrangements that have emerged as part of conflict transformation processes.

In terms of the former, history education can contain values that either promote division or encourage peaceful management of diversity. For example, analysis of pre-genocide Rwandan textbooks indicates that Hutus and Tutsis were portrayed in opposition to one another, which highlighted group division and encouraged intolerance (King 2014). In terms of post-conflict curriculum reform, this raises questions about how far history teaching should refer to recent, violent events. In some cases, this may mean introducing a period of silence, like the moratorium on history reform in Rwanda. However, evidence from Lebanon indicates that silence on the civil war during history class means that children turn to politicized sources, such as family members and political parties (van Ommering 2015). Barton and McCully (2005) found a similar phenomenon in Northern Ireland for which students drew selectively from the “neutral” history curriculum in their classroom to support their developing identifications with historical narratives of their own political/religious communities. According to these findings, history education should address students’ developing ideas more directly by providing alternatives to historical narratives students encounter elsewhere (Barton and McCully 2005).

However, it could be argued that conflict transformation is not simply about understanding the past, but also learning about the processes involved in bringing an end to violence and the new arrangements designed to guarantee equal rights and protection of minorities, and contributing to shared sense of belonging or identity. In this respect, citizenship education is often considered a critical part of transformation and reconciliation in post-conflict

and divided societies (Bellino 2015a; Cole 2007; Davies 2004; Paulson 2011). Scholars from political science, education, and philosophy have argued that citizenship education is an essential component of any democratic society because citizens do not learn to engage in democratic institutions automatically (e.g. Banks 2007; Gutmann 1999; Kymlicka 1995; Levinson and Stevick 2007). In particular, it can be concluded that teaching civic values and citizenship practices in public schools can support stable democratic societies (Hahn 1998; Osler and Starkey 2005), can help democratization in transitional societies (Anderson 2007; Janmaat and Piattoeva 2007), and can aid in reconciliation in post-conflict societies (Davies 2005; Murphy and Gallagher 2009). Last, values, attitudes and behaviours learned through citizenship education socialize children about who may be regarded as a citizen, which shapes their perspective towards various groups, local regions, and people who come from elsewhere.

In the context of Northern Ireland where 93 percent of students attend segregated schools (Gardner 2016) and children grow up in communities that define themselves as mainly British or Irish, a citizenship curriculum was introduced after the peace agreement that focuses less on the concept of one common nationality and more on questions about equality, diversity and human rights within a divided society emerging from violent conflict (Niens, O'Connor, and Smith 2013; Smith 2003). The following sections provide an overview of the peace agreement in Northern Ireland and the lack of a formal truth and reconciliation process. Despite this, it is argued that the introduction of citizenship education represented one element of a fragmented approach to transitional justice that carried the potential for formal education to engage children and young people with conflict transformation in Northern Ireland.

Progress since the peace agreement

More than 3,600 people were killed and 30,000 injured as part of 'the Troubles' in Northern Ireland. More than half of the deaths were civilians. Fatalities were inflicted on both communities (43% Catholics, 30% Protestants) and all parties to the conflict were responsible for some of the deaths (Fay, Morrissey, and Smyth 1999). By the 1990s, it was becoming clear that neither the use of violence nor a military intervention would resolve the issue. Ceasefires in 1994 eventually created the opportunity for a peace process that led to a political agreement. Referenda on the agreement were held in May 1998. In the Republic of Ireland 94% of voters approved of the proposals. In Northern Ireland, 71% of those voting endorsed the Agreement. The signing of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement in 1998 marked a transition from a violent conflict to an attempt to resolve the dispute about the constitutional status of Northern Ireland by non-violent, democratic means.

The Belfast Agreement had three main elements. First, it addressed the constitutional status of the territory. As part of peace negotiations, the Republic of Ireland removed a territorial claim over Northern Ireland from its constitution and both governments recognized 'the birth right of all the people of Northern Ireland to identify themselves and be accepted as Irish or British, or both'. For the first time the agreement also accepted that the future constitutional status of the territory will be determined by "the wish of the majority of the people who live there" (Northern Ireland Office 1998). The agreement deferred a decision on the ultimate sovereignty of the territory and both governments promised to respect the outcome of any future decision through 'self-determination.' There is no detail in the agreement about the mechanism or process by which such a decision would be reached. Therefore, the agreement managed to 'transform' the conflict, but the core constitutional question has not been 'resolved' rather it is has been left for future generations.

The second main element of the agreement was the establishment of new democratic institutions that involve power-sharing between locally elected politicians. These replaced direct rule from the UK Westminster government in London. A new legislative Northern Ireland Assembly was created of 108 local politicians (recently reduced to 90), and a 12-member Executive body comprised of politicians from different parties. A First Minister and Deputy First Minister are jointly elected by members of the Assembly voting on a cross community basis and Ministers are allocated to posts according to the d'Hondt system. Decisions in the Assembly are made by a weighted majority to ensure cross community support. The establishment of these structures in Northern Ireland was consistent with devolution to new assemblies in Scotland and Wales, but there have been significant challenges and the NI Assembly has been suspended on a number of occasions. The most recent Assembly collapsed in January 2017 when the Sinn Féin Deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness resigned after the Democratic Unionist First Minister, Arlene Foster refused to step down whilst an enquiry into the administration of a government heating fuel scheme took place. This led to an election in March 2017, but the failure to date to re-establish a new Assembly has highlighted other issues that have contributed to lack of trust between the two dominant parties, such as lack of investigations and prosecutions related to the Troubles and support for victims.

There are arguments that the new political arrangement has institutionalized sectarian politics because it involves a form of consociationalism advocated by Lijphart (2004) that requires mandatory coalition between ideologically opposed political parties. In the early days, this was a considerable achievement, but the government is now being shared by two main power blocks (pro British Unionism and pro nationalist Republicanism). This has led to a weak 'middle ground' and the lack of a formal opposition also means that there are concerns about

accountability. Political observers and the public at large have criticized this mandatory coalition for lack of progress on ‘legacy issues’ and expressions of cultural identity, such as parades and flying of flags (Northern Ireland Office 2006). There has also been lack of progress on ‘dealing with the past’ through official enquiries into unsolved killings, and support for victims and survivors of the violent conflict remain the cause of disagreement between the two majority political parties (Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Féin).

Liberal peacebuilding and transitional justice

The peace agreement in Northern Ireland contains many of the elements that have come to be known as ‘liberal peacebuilding,’ in that there were efforts to negotiate ceasefires followed by peace negotiations that concentrated on disarmament, security issues, elections to new political structures to encourage multiparty democracy and attempts at economic regeneration (Newman, Paris, and Richmond 2009). Critics of liberal peacebuilding argue it is inherently conservative as it values state stability over all other criteria. It often brokers peace between elites and reinforces elites’ power so that the benefits of peace (‘peace dividends’) rarely reach the most marginalized or those most affected by the conflict (Richmond 2013). Fearon and Laitin (2004) also suggest that “writers on liberal peacebuilding tend to underestimate the importance of domestic political processes and the agency of individual actors who are either importers or resisters of liberal policies.” Others suggest that peacebuilding requires early engagement with social development (Guerrero 2011; Ndaruhutse S. et al. 2011; McCandless 2012) so that the underlying causes of conflict are addressed as well as the symptoms. Investment in education as part of peacebuilding may be one way of contributing to sustainable peace (Smith et al. 2011; Novelli and Smith 2011).

Despite the criticisms of liberal peacebuilding, the example of Northern Ireland is a relatively successful one with new political institutions established and little return to violence since the agreement. However, Northern Ireland has not had a formal Truth and Reconciliation Commission or transitional justice process. Instead there have been disparate initiatives that have contributed to truth recovery and transitional justice. For example, the Bloody Sunday Inquiry was established in 1998 to investigate the killing of civilians in Derry in 1972. The inquiry cost more than £200million and the findings that British soldiers had fired on unarmed civilians were eventually published in 2010, which resulted in an apology from the Prime Minister on behalf of the British government. There have been calls for public enquiries into other unresolved incidents, such as the 1998 Omagh bomb which killed 29 civilians. .. The police service set up an alternative approach through the Historical Enquiries Team in 2005 (later replaced by the Legacy Investigations Branch in 2014) to investigate the 3,269 unsolved murders committed between 1968-98. These investigations remain highly sensitive and one estimate is that there is a backlog of 12 years and little likelihood of solving these cases (McCracken 2015).

Whilst a formal truth commission has not been established, a Consultative Group on the Past was created by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in 2007. It consulted widely on how society could best deal with the legacy of events related to the conflict. The final report (Consultative Group on the Past 2009) contained 31 recommendations, including the creation of a Legacy Commission, proposals for truth recovery, support for victims and an approach to remembrance, memorials and commemoration. The report also acknowledged the “importance of education in building a better understanding of the nature and causes of the conflict” and recommended that young people be “provided with the skills necessary to ensure there is no repeat of the past,” but expressed concern “that resources are not being made available to support

the next generation to cope with the legacy of the conflict.” However, the overall recommendations were overshadowed by a controversial proposal for a one-off payment of £12,000 to the nearest relative of anyone killed during conflict from January 1966 as a means of drawing a line under the past. There was an overwhelmingly negative reaction to this and the proposals have not been taken forward. Whilst there were references to education in general terms as cited above, the Consultative Group also missed an opportunity to recommend that education officials include a formal education programme related to the legacy of the Troubles as part of the curriculum although EU funded research indicated an appetite amongst young people to learn about the reasons for the conflict within their society (Magill, Smith and Hamber 2009).

The potential of the Northern Ireland curriculum for transitional justice

Whilst some new political institutions have seen significant transformation, conflict continues in arenas like education where there has been little change since the peace agreement. Current students are, arguably, the first generation not to experience the worst excesses of the conflict, but vestiges of the Troubles remain and these young people still attend school in segregated environments (O’Connor 2012). Murphy (2016) argues that the lack of committed reform to integrating Northern Ireland schools prevents the education sector from making a substantive contribution to transitional justice efforts and to reconciling divisions in the post-conflict context.

The Revised Northern Ireland Curriculum of 2007 includes a number of potential opportunities for the inclusion of teaching and learning related to transitional justice. For example, at primary level the inclusion of Personal and Social Development as an area of study opens up opportunities to build a stronger commitment to human rights values and practices from an early age. Religious Education is also part of the statutory curriculum in all schools in

Northern Ireland. At primary level, the Department of Education has published a Core Syllabus in consultation with the four main Christian churches in Northern Ireland, alongside non-statutory guidance materials.¹ At secondary level, the RE curriculum includes an exploration of ‘Prejudice, Sectarianism and Reconciliation’ from a moral perspective, as well as the opportunity to study ‘World Religions.’²

The History curriculum at Key Stage 3 (age 12-14) is compulsory and requires that pupils, “investigate how history has been selectively interpreted to create stereotypical perceptions and to justify views and actions, for example, the Troubles, slavery, apartheid, Arab/Israeli conflict” and “investigate the long and short term causes and consequences of the partition of Ireland and how it has influenced Northern Ireland today including key events and turning points.”³ History is optional for pupils at Key Stage 4 (age 15-16) as part of the GCSE public examinations and involves a choice between studying either ‘Peace, War and Neutrality, 1937-49’ or ‘Northern Ireland and Its Neighbours, 1960-85.’ The latter is soon to be revised and extended to cover the period up to 1998 so that the whole period of the Troubles is included.

The 2007 curriculum also saw the introduction of Local and Global Citizenship (LGC) as a statutory requirement at Key Stage 3 (age 12-14) and an optional GCSE examination⁴ subject at Key Stage 4 (age 15-16). These were new additions since previously citizenship education had not been part of the curriculum. A number of factors contributed to this new development. A broader review of the curriculum was already underway with a view to making it more relevant to the needs of society. This coincided with an international resurgence in civics and citizenship

¹ These can be accessed at: http://ccea.org.uk/curriculum/key_stage_1_2/areas_learning/religious_education

² These can be accessed at: http://ccea.org.uk/curriculum/key_stage_3/areas_learning/religious_education

³ An overview of the statutory requirements for History at Key Stage 3 (age 12-14) as part of the NI Curriculum, can be found at: http://ccea.org.uk/curriculum/key_stage_3/areas_learning/environment_and_society

⁴ The General Certificate of Secondary Education Exams are required at end of compulsory education in the U.K.

education in the 1990s and an increase in formal democracies “related to significant world events such as the ending of apartheid in South Africa, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the democratisation of former Communist states in Eastern Europe and the disintegration of the Soviet Union” (Smith and Print 2003).

In Northern Ireland, the signing of the peace agreement in 1998 and the establishment of a new, devolved Assembly had significant implications for education in terms of how children and young people might learn about the new political arrangements, although this was not acknowledged explicitly at the time or identified as a transformational task for education in the Agreement. New equality legislation further underlined the need for education to introduce young people to human rights principles. A pilot programme was already underway in 24 post-primary schools throughout Northern Ireland (Arlow 1999) and this was eventually adopted by the curriculum authorities and formed the basis for the statutory programme.

The political context also had significant implications for the model of citizenship education that emerged in Northern Ireland. A ‘patriotic’ model of citizenship that promotes loyalty to the State would be inappropriate in a situation where the concept of nationality is a divisive issue (Smith 2003). In Northern Ireland, young people are growing up in a society that expects them to occupy the same civic space despite holding different loyalties in terms of national identity. We see the challenge as whether it is possible to disentangle concepts of ‘nationality’ and ‘identity’ from concepts of ‘citizenship.’ This is reflected in the title which uses the term ‘local’ to refer in large part to the political context of Northern Ireland rather than the ‘national’ contexts of either the UK or Ireland. The juxtaposition with ‘global’ reflects both a strong lobby at the time for a global dimension in the new curriculum as well as the opportunity to contrast the NI experience with other international, particularly conflict-affected contexts. It is

also significant that an inquiry-based model was adopted. The LGC emphasis is on exploring a set of core concepts ('Diversity and Inclusion'; 'Human Rights and Social Responsibilities'; 'Equality and Social Justice'; and 'Democracy and Active Participation') which are regarded as problematic from the outset and explored from multiple perspectives through a range of local and international issues. In terms of a potential contribution to transitional justice, there are quite explicit statutory requirements in the LGC curriculum to "investigate how and why conflict, including prejudice, stereotyping, sectarianism and racism may arise in the community" and "investigate ways of managing conflict and promoting community relations and reconciliation." The citizenship framework also includes opportunities to examine key human rights commitments and investigate ways of strengthening democratic participation as an alternative to violence.⁵

In terms of practical implementation, it is also important to note that the pilot programme argued for dedicated time within the curriculum, but schools were ultimately given the freedom to determine whether to provide LGC through timetabled space, cross-curricular provision by infusion across other subject disciplines, whole school activities or a combination of these. LGC was also incorporated into a broader curriculum theme known as Learning for Life and Work that includes strands on employability, personal development and home economics which may have considerably lessened its impact. These arrangements also meant that LGC teachers (some volunteers, some conscripts) are drawn from a range of disciplines and this has led to a diverse range of practice that has been the subject of subsequent research and evaluation (Jeffers and

⁵ An overview of the statutory requirements for Local and Global Citizenship as part of the Northern Ireland Curriculum, along with a teaching resource developed by the curriculum authorities can be found at: http://ccea.org.uk/curriculum/key_stage_3/areas_learning/learning_life_and_work/local_and_global_citizenship

O'Connor 2008; Niens and Chastaney 2008; O'Connor 2008, 2012; Emerson 2012; Niens, O'Connor, and Smith 2013; McCully and Clarke 2016).

The revised curriculum contains a number of entry points to address legacies of the past, conflict transformation and reconciliation. Even though there is no single curriculum programme, opportunities exist through statutory requirements for Religious Education, History and Local and Global Citizenship. However, the linkages are neither neat nor unproblematic as our teachers from our study discuss, and the relationship between the distinctive roles of history and citizenship is unclear. Even history teachers in Northern Ireland are divided about the extent to which the subject should be part of the political aspects of contemporary history. Waldron and McCully found that “in practice, the sensitivities of a divided and violent society meant that many teachers shied away from the harder challenges it posed, leaving the ‘risk-takers’ to occupy the contested space of history’s contemporary relevance” (2016). It is in this context that we have included both history and citizenship education teachers in this study.

Data and methods

This article draws from a larger, ongoing study on teachers, social memory, and citizenship and history education in Northern Ireland. The data presented here are from the first two phases of data collection in October 2012 and September 2014 – January 2015. During this data collection, we⁶ developed a purposeful sample of schools and interviewed additional education actors who were involved with history and citizenship education. We conducted twenty-seven interviews: fifteen with post-primary school teachers; seven curriculum specialists (three educational NGO representatives, two government officials, and two university professors); and

⁶ Co-author Elizabeth Anderson Worden conducted the fieldwork and all interviews for the project with funding from the US UK Fulbright Commission, American University, and Ulster University. Co-author Alan Smith aided in the data analysis.

five history teachers enrolled in a post-graduate certificate in education program (PGCE). These interviews focused on a range of topics, including the teachers' background and life outside of work, how they teach controversial subjects, and how they have implemented the 2007 LCG program. The teachers represented a range of post-primary schools⁷ across two counties in both urban and more rural settings: three Catholic grammar (two co-ed and one all girls) and one secondary (co-ed), two predominantly Protestant grammar (one co-ed and one all girls) and two secondary (both co-ed), and one integrated (co-ed attended by both Catholic and Protestant pupils). We also conducted approximately 30 hours of school observation.

In creating the initial sample in 2012, we worked with the staff at Ulster University to identify pre-service teachers and local teachers who would be willing to participate. After nine initial interviews in 2012, we worked again with Ulster staff in 2014 to develop a purposeful sample of teachers across school types and location. In 2012, we interviewed only history teachers but expanded the study in 2014 and 2015 to include teachers who taught citizenship in addition to their primary subject. As a result, we interviewed teachers from art, history, politics, languages, home economics, and religion. The interviews, which lasted between forty minutes to two hours, were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Using inductive codes, we utilized the software program ATLAS.ti to code and manage the transcripts. All research was approved by the institutional review board and ethics board of American University and Ulster University. All names, identifying characteristics of individuals, and school names have been changed.

Findings

⁷ Post-primary schools include years 8-14 (approximately ages 11-18).

We identify the following as organizational constraints: positioning of LGC in the Curriculum, the lack of compulsory examination for the subject in the upper levels of post-primary, and ‘do it yourself’ lesson plans and textbooks that are potentially too abstract for some teachers. We also identify two missed opportunities that limit the potential impact of LGC.

LGC: positioning, priority, and status within the curriculum

Teachers reported that the subject strands of Learning for Life and Work are generally seen as less rigorous than disciplinary specific areas of learning, such as mathematics or English. A teacher at an urban school added that parents regarded LLW and LGC as “soft” and were less inclined to support it. One university professor who has worked closely with teachers and curriculum development for the past several decades referred to LGC as “tucked away” in the curriculum for which it is “not taken seriously” by the entire educational system. Those involved with the LGC’s development were disheartened by the subject’s place in the curriculum.

Colin is a curriculum specialist who worked closely with the development of LGC. When asked what he would have “done differently looking back” on the development of LGC, he thought locating it within LLW was a critical error:

Colin: . . . the amalgamation of citizenship into Learning for Life and Work, I think, was catastrophic. I can't stress enough - what a big mistake I think that was.

Interviewer: And well, what happened? Why is it positioned in LLW?

Colin: At the end of the day it was a decision that was taken above our level - above the curriculum council itself. And there were internal political reasons for that and I often suspected there were big “P” issues, big political issues at stake as well. And, amalgamating citizenship and employability gives two very different perspectives on...

Interviewer: The purpose of education?

Colin: Exactly. And they also combine two areas which don't have a great deal of conceptual overlap, or even overlap in terms of teachers who are competent to teach it. I think they went

some way to neutering the possible impact of citizenship maybe that's just... maybe me being cynical, but I've always suspected there was something to that.

In referencing politics with big “P”, Colin suspects that there was resistance among some politicians or political parties to the new citizenship education program. With its emphasis on human rights, progressive politicians would most likely support it while conservatives would not.⁸

Prioritizing subjects - often expressed by which subjects are “examinable” - is essential because educators feel increased pressure to cover all the mandatory subjects in their school schedule, and to accommodate students preparing for a range of optional GCSEs. Across our sample, teachers agreed that there was not enough time to teach all of the requirements of the new curriculum. Sharon, who is veteran teacher and administrator at a controlled grammar school, remarked in great certainty when asked about challenges with the new curriculum: “Timetable, literally fitting everything in.” Across the county at a maintained secondary school another veteran teacher Mary concurred when asked challenges:

Really, when you take the amount of time [required for each subject], the percentage of time that everything's supposed to have, it's virtually impossible to get it in.

Susan who teaches LCG in another part of the county added:

We've been experimenting because it's compulsory that everybody has LLW classes as you're probably aware of at this stage in Northern Ireland. It's not compulsory that they sit the exam. Now, up until last year, [in our school], we entered everybody in for the GCSE exam. . . . Now that's changed because our timetable has been squeezed and squeezed and squeezed with more new subjects that we have to offer and there's a big push that we offer - I think it's about 24 subjects - for the GCSE. So, for a small school, that's big. That's a tall order for a small school and so the timetable's been squeezed.

⁸ This is often highlighted in public debates over history textbooks for which the subject of history is de facto citizenship education in many contexts. See for example Worden 2014 and Zimmerman 2002.

Teachers felt that “literally” they could not fit in all the subjects but also there was feeling that they were stretched thin, especially for the teachers for which LGC was an ‘add-on’ to the area of expertise—for example, an art teacher who also taught citizenship.

Teacher empowerment v. prescribed materials?

The competing demands affect teachers’ professional development. John is a curriculum specialist who works at a local NGO that provides professional development opportunities for teachers, primarily focusing on pedagogies for teaching controversial topics within subjects like history and citizenship. Yet he has a hard time recruiting teachers to take part, despite the fact that the workshops are often funded. He attributes this to the lack of prioritization in the school schedule for these subjects:

Some [financial] cover is essential for teachers - but even if they get their own room and board, it’s not a silver bullet. . . . And there’s so much pressure around teachers, particularly in regards to GCSE and A level classes, that they’re [careful about] missing classes they’re kind of going, ‘I’d love to be there but I have this GCSE class.’

Individual teachers collect, compile, and develop their own teaching materials for LGC. As long as the teachers are meeting the curriculum objectives, they can use whatever materials they like. When the new curriculum was introduced in 2007, a cadre of teachers participated in LGC training and the curriculum development team created a large packet of materials (referred to as the “purple pack” because it was assembled in a big purple binder) with sample lesson plans, readings, and instructional guides. According to two of our informants who were involved closely with the project, the packet was designed to be only a starting point for teachers who should tailor the materials to fit their classroom needs and to reflect current events. They

thought giving teachers “autonomy” or empowerment over the LGC teaching would engage them more. Yet if teachers are reluctant or not rewarded for participating in the professional development, they will not move beyond the prescribed purple pack.

As it turns out, the flexibility within the curriculum works well for some teachers who are enthusiastic about LGC and enjoy creating lessons from current events. It works less well for those teachers who are indifferent about LGC (as was one of the teachers who had been assigned to fill a vacancy by the principal) or have little time to develop or refine existing materials. Susan explains:

I like it in a way, because everybody brings a little bit of their own expertise from their original subject into citizenship. Which is quite nice. But, everybody’s going to approach it a slightly different way. But, what I do find, for people who are reluctant to teach it, but they’re told, “Sorry. It’s on your timetable,” they want the comfort blanket. They want the textbook. And they will not veer away from that textbook. [In contrast,] the person, as I say, who takes off the blinkers and thinks, “Well, it’s on my timetable, never done it before. It’s going to be a new experience for me,” they’ll see things in the media; they see things in our community and they think, ‘Oh, I could use that for my citizenship class.’

In at least two of our schools, the head of department, like Susan, developed materials for LGC in their school to help those who want and need a “comfort blanket.” There are proactive teachers in the system that put in the extra effort to make up the shortcomings.

Two teachers, who were more enthusiastic about developing their materials, discussed the importance of creating a ‘safe space’ for unpacking some difficult topics covered in LGC. One from Catholic grammar school has carefully cultivated a safe atmosphere in her classroom. She describes how she challenges her students to question their labels and stereotypes:

. . . they see it’s safe to share. And it’s safe for me to say things.
Now, I did say something last year with a group of 16-year-olds.
We were talking about identity and the way we pigeon-hole

people because of their identity and I said . . . ‘Does every Catholic want to be in a United Ireland? And does every Protestant want to be part of the UK?’ . . . And we were talking about Protestants who work in London. ..[and how]when they go to other parts of Britain, they’re perceived as Irish. We were exploring all this. Then I said that I would like Northern Ireland to remain part of the UK and they said, ‘But you’re Irish !’ So, I said, ‘I’m Irish but I’m a Unionist.’ And they were very shocked at me saying that and I said, ‘Well, let’s break it down. Why would I say something like that?’

This is an example of a teacher who is able to push her students to question their stereotypes and think critically - both of which contribute to the larger goals of education for reconciliation through citizenship. Mary also takes a risk by revealing her own seemingly contradictory identities (Irish *and* Unionist) to make the point. These interactions are not easy and they require a committed teacher.

Here within lies the potential hazard of do it yourself textbooks and teachers who are less than enthusiastic or pressed for time: their classrooms might not become the safe spaces that are necessary for addressing difficult subjects. John, who organizes the professional development, reflects on this point:

So, you’ve a lot of teachers don’t fully get what the curriculum was trying to do - you have those challenges and then you’ve the content challenges and linking back to the curriculum issue, a lot of teachers go, ‘I don’t have time to go into that much detail.’

Yet building the democratic skills necessary for reconciliation might require that much detail.

Missed Opportunities

Like their counterparts across the globe, teachers from this study are complex individuals that are by no means a homogenous group. They come from different traditions, backgrounds, and have varied life experiences that inform their viewpoints and classroom practice. Yet overall, the teachers supported the new LGC programme - even those who struggled with a

squeezed timetable. In response to the question “what is the purpose of teaching citizenship and why is it important for your country?” almost all the teachers gave responses that echoed the aforementioned goals of citizenship education. Thirteen out of the fifteen teachers from the 2014 data collection discussed the importance of fostering understanding, tolerance, and/or dialogue through citizenship classes. Michael, who teaches at a grammar school, responded with just one word when asked: “tolerance.” Meg, who teaches art and citizenship in another part of the country stressed that “dialogue would be the most important aspect. Dialogue, communication, not hitting the roof whenever you hear a viewpoint that’s different than your own!”

In tandem with this support, we discovered missed opportunities - areas where teachers could more effectively engage their students and promote the goals of LGC. First, we found an attitude that citizenship education was something needed more for those students who live in areas still affected by sectarian conflict or for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Second and related to the first, teachers underestimated the importance of teaching political literacy.

Over half of the teachers discussed socio-economic status in the interviews though we did not explicitly ask about social class. Teachers appeared to use social class as a justification for taking LGC less seriously. Peter, a politics and LGC teacher at a grammar school, speculates that students at secondary schools - that is, non-selective schools - need citizenship education more than his pupils:

I honestly don’t know but my sort of a preconceived notion would be that the secondary schools, which are the non-selectives, probably spend more time in citizenships and issues like that because they usually come from a more divided backgrounds, especially city areas in Belfast, London Derry, and the kids would be more tuned in to political difference at a very basic level. Whereas, in grammar schools they would be a wee bit more middle class especially somewhere like [this town] here. As I said before, the

divisions aren't that obvious. The conflict is not really coming into the classroom . . .

Peter thought there were two purposes to citizenship education: teaching about "how democracy works" (voting and so forth) and addressing "the sectarian divide between the two majority communities with the idea of diversity." But for Peter, addressing this sectarian divide might be more applicable to those who have experienced it.

Mary, who teaches in the neighbouring county, would agree. Her grammar school has been widening its demographics and Mary thought this would prioritize LGC and LLW: "with our changing demographic, maybe the priority that Learning for Life and Work gets in the grammar school [will change] . . . we are recognizing maybe more of a need for it but haven't actually got to the stage of working out how to do it." Jeannie who teaches in another grammar school addressed widening demographics and the challenges that this posed: "we've got girls now that don't have that same background . . . [they don't] have parents who know the importance of tolerance, respect, and empathy."

Laurel, who teaches history and LGC, at an integrated school believed that LGC had an important role to play in widening in the viewpoints students from lower socio-economic backgrounds:

. . . because of the social economic background that they come from they don't take the path that we would really like for them and they don't take the opportunities that are given to them. So it's really important to let them see that they are within sight; that they've a role to play. You know, in making it better; making it a better place rather than that it doesn't matter if 'I don't pass my GCSEs'; 'it doesn't matter if I don't go to work'; 'it doesn't matter if I'm on the dole'; 'it doesn't matter, if I don't make something of my life.' We want to try and, you know, get that out their heads or mindset that that's an option for them.

It is apparent that these teachers believe students from a lower social economic background have much to gain from LGC. This is discouraging news because political apathy and complacency

can affect citizens from all social strata. This emphasis on social class potentially blinds teachers to the benefits of teaching citizenship skills to all students and misses an opportunity for engaging fully with LGC. This finding echoes a broader tension in the field for which education initiatives are most often targeted at those “most affected” by conflict—either by social class or other social identities (e.g., Paulson 2010; Bellino 2015b).

The other missed opportunity is the teachers’ underestimation of the importance or relevance of teaching political literacy—that is, the set of practical or ‘hard’ skills needed to participate in political life and critically discern current political events (see Davies 2004; Moodley and Adam 2007). Through the LGC curriculum, teachers need to hit a careful balance of preparing students to participate in new political configurations and aiding in reconciliation. The teacher interviews were striking because of the relative absence of discussion about teaching the logistics of democratic life. The majority of the teachers considered developing tolerance, mutual respect, and dialogue to be the primary purposes of citizenship education. Most important for the Northern Ireland context, young people need to be prepared for if and when there is a referendum vote on the sovereignty question that the Good Friday Agreement left open. Peter discusses helping students understand “how democracy works.” He is an exception - issues related to reconciling the divisions within society dominated the conversations about the teachers’ understanding of citizenship education. What teachers do in their classroom might differ from what they say outside of the classroom. We do not have enough classroom observation data to determine the extent of this difference. Yet, we argue that our conversations, which revealed that the need for imparting democratic skills in young people is underestimated, merit mentioning and open further avenues for research.

Discussion and conclusion

Northern Ireland represents a good example of ‘liberal peacebuilding,’ which has had positive outcomes, not least a reduction in violence and new power-sharing governance, but it has also had constraints and limitations at both the political and educational level. One of the main critiques of liberal peacebuilding is that it prioritises the management of violent conflict through agreement between political elites and promotion of economic development over addressing underlying causes of conflict through social development, transitional justice processes and dealing with legacies of the past. The most recent collapse of the NI Assembly in December 2016, 18 years after the original agreement, highlights how fragile such an approach can be. Ironically, the power sharing arrangements have limited the extent to which it has been possible to create a formal truth and reconciliation process, but there have been other, less formal opportunities.

The introduction of LGC was one aspect of education that carried the potential to contribute to transformation and change by educating new generations of children and young people about the violent conflict in their own society and the challenges of creating a more peaceful future. However, its impact has been limited for a number of reasons. Whilst there was a strong rationale for citizenship education after the agreement it remains on the periphery of the curriculum with a low status and limited space within a system that prioritises academic achievement and examination results. The design represents a fundamental tension between inquiry-based approaches to learning and more traditional, academic approaches. Two important opportunities have been missed: a contribution to helping all young people from all socio-economic backgrounds understand the importance of dealing with the past and legacies of the conflict; and preparing young people with the knowledge and skills necessary for political

literacy to decide the future constitutional status of NI through participation in democratic politics and a future referendum.

The Northern Ireland case has highlighted new avenues of inquiry. Through analysing these constraints and missed opportunities, we also uncovered a blind spot in the organization and implementation of LGC: because it is a separate subject from history and teachers from a range of disciplinary background teach LGC, teachers can avoid difficult conversations about the violent past and its enduring legacies. To this point, Gallagher (2017) suggests that a prescribed curriculum might relieve this but only if the curriculum engages with difficult issues. The LGC framework calls students to understand conflict, sectarianism, and prejudices, but the focus is on the present and future. We recognize that teaching about the past is political and the curriculum specialists need to develop a citizenship programme which both sides support. This leads us to a thorny question: to what extent can educators and policymakers separate education for reconciliation and democratic citizenship from teaching directly about a difficult past? We do not have a straightforward answer but the disconnection between teaching for citizenship while addressing the past has potentially under-estimated the extent to which legacies still have the potential to destabilize current political arrangements. This tension has implications for other societies for which education policymakers might attempt to side-line teaching about a violent past while promoting citizenship education. It might not be possible to have one without the other. We also ponder if enlarging the scope of citizenship education (incorporating both local and global perspectives and themes) provides educators with a convenient cover for avoiding contentious subjects at the local level. It might be much easier for teachers to discuss and draw lessons from human rights abuses that happened elsewhere than abuses that have happened in one's country.

Related to the lack of discussion about the violent past, we do not know the extent to which teachers use the organizational constraints and attitudes, like the ‘squeezed timetable’ or that grammar school students do not need LGC, as an excuse for not engaging more fully with LGC. Do they hide behind the veil of an exam-focused curriculum and school culture as a way to avoid uncomfortable subjects? Perhaps they are sceptical about the value of teaching citizenship despite publicly supporting it. Alternatively, they might not find any reward in teaching it. These are possibilities that merit further investigation. As our fellow contributors in this volume demonstrate, teachers play a pivotal role in the transformation of conflict-affected contexts and there is more to learn about these critical actors.

While the placement of LGC in the Northern Ireland curriculum is disadvantageous, we are optimistic. Northern Ireland education policymakers incorporated transitional justice aims throughout the curriculum in the absence of a formal state-sponsored process. While the effectiveness in this particular case and at this time is limited, Northern Ireland is an example of a citizenship education programme that has explicitly moved away from an emphasis on national identity and embraced human rights with an eye to bettering the future for all citizens. Taking a cue from Northern Ireland, other deeply divided societies might find citizenship education to be an effective venue to promote transitional justice amongst their young citizens.

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